

The Salisbury Planning Board held its regular meeting Tuesday, June 26, 2007, in the City Council Chamber of the Salisbury City Hall at 4 p.m. with the following being present and absent:

PRESENT: Karen Alexander, Dr. Mark Beymer, Robert Cockerl, Richard Huffman, Craig Neuhardt, Sandy Reitz, Jeff Smith, Valarie Stewart, and Price Wagoner

ABSENT: Tommy Hairston, Albert Stout, and Diane Young

STAFF: Janet Gapen, Dan Mikkelson, Preston Mitchell, Diana Moghrabi, and Joe Morris

Dr. Mark Beymer, Chairman, called the meeting to order and offered an invocation. The minutes of the June 12, 2007, meeting were approved as published. The Planning Board adopted the agenda, deferring Z-05S-07 until the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

North Main Small Area Plan

Janet Gapen made a presentation on the North Main Small Area Plan at a Courtesy Hearing, reiterating much of what was covered at the previous meeting. This presentation will also be sent to the City Council July 17, 2007.

The purpose of the plan is to provide a recommendation for land use and infrastructure that are in alignment with the neighborhood's vision for its future. The process was lengthier than originally hoped. There were a variety of meeting formats with residents from the area. Staff tried to get as much commentary as possible from the residents so staff could understand what they felt was most important for preserving, highlighting, and enhancing their neighborhood. What are the elements of the neighborhood that could be improved or changed?

The most valued features of the neighborhood include the fact that it is an attractive neighborhood, it is architecturally interesting and in an historic district, there exists racial and socioeconomic diversity, there are mature trees and landscaping, and the location is close to downtown and to City Park.

The most pressing challenges for this neighborhood are the amount of rental properties, instances of vacant or rundown businesses and homes, a need for pedestrian / bicycle facilities and repairs, the traffic conditions on North Main Street, there exists various appearance issues, and crime. The width of North Main Street makes it hard to cross the street.

This neighborhood is an important gateway into Salisbury that is primarily residential in character. That makes the condition of the residential neighborhood very important. Nonresidential uses are fairly consistent with what planners like to see in a neighborhood. The office uses clustered at 13th Street and smaller retail located at street intersections offer greater protection for the residential areas.

There is a remnant from the industrial past at the core of the neighborhood; it is an area in transition. Market conditions could support more mixed uses / redevelopment; this should be done on an appropriate scale. Zoning is largely consistent with the existing land uses. This area will fall under urban residential preservation in the proposed new code. The proposed code has residential infill standards that will help protect the integrity of the neighborhood.

- The North Main Street area includes a National Register Historic District and a Local Historic District; there are opportunities to expand the historic districts.
- Currently the area is about one-half rental and one-half owner-occupied housing; there is concern when it is higher in rentals than owner occupied. Distribution can fluctuate a good deal through the neighborhood. This is not to imply that there is an inherent problem with renter-occupied housing.
- There is a need for more multi-modal transportation. The neighborhood has a number of sidewalks that are aging and in need of repair.
- There is software called "City Green" that demonstrates the tree canopy in the area. Staff can calculate the dollar value of the tree canopy. This tree canopy can sequester 4,600 tons of carbon and over 10,000 pounds of pollutants annually. The value to public health was estimated at over \$25,000 annually. There is an opportunity to create open space on vast old parking lots.

Recommendations:

- (1) Build neighborhood identity—the neighborhood is interested in defining and enhancing the gateway. Ms. Gopen showed images of a roundabout design that was submitted by a student landscape architect. A variety of treatments could work—pavement treatments, public art, and a median in the center of the street.
- (2) Encourage the creative adaptive reuse of the neighborhoods unique historic architecture.
- (3) Work with the Branding and Wayfinding Committee to develop unique signage for the neighborhood which expresses its unique appeal.
- (4) Recommendation for residents to continue to broaden participation and encourage more participation among other homeowners, landlords and renters in the neighborhood organization.
- (5) Strengthen ties between Henderson Independent High School and the neighborhood. The school was once a very central part of daily life in the neighborhood; it is not as connected to the community as it once was.
- (6) Expand the transportation network—study the possibilities to change North Main Street to make it more conducive for pedestrians and cyclists, including reducing the width of North Main Street, installing medians, enhanced crosswalks, bicycle lanes, marked on-street parking, and even roundabouts. The NCDOT has indicated that they are willing to support these ideas, but need further study. The residents have said it is important to them to strengthen their connection to City Park. There is a request to install sidewalk on West Miller Street to City Park, between North Main Street and City Park, which is two city blocks in length. Sidewalk repair priorities include West Henderson Street and several sections of North Main Street. It is important to respect the pattern of gridded streets in future development.
- (7) Improve neighborhood services and amenities

- (8) Increase trees and open space—capitalize on opportunities. Consider incentives or landscape grant programs to help reduce the sea of pavement that is common in sections of the neighborhood. Focus tree plantings along North Main Street.
- (9) Improve housing conditions—expand the housing code enforcement activities. The City Manager has formed a committee to explore feasibility of approaches to comprehensively combat the issue of housing problems.
- (10) Improve neighborhood appearance (like parking on the front lawns). Promote burying utilities as part of any substantial redevelopment project. This would be very costly.
- (11) Promote existing tax credits that are available for historic commercial buildings. There are a number of examples that could qualify. Consider a commercial façade or landscape grant program to help facilitate improvement of commercial properties.
- (12) Establish a corridor overlay district to insure that land uses and development patterns are compatible with the neighborhood character.

Janet stated that City Council has approved, in the 2007-2008 budget, funding to begin making some improvements.

Public Comment

Mr. Ed Clement of 310 South Ellis Street owns the historic Steele house in the North Main Street Neighborhood. He stated that he supports the proposed plan for North Main Street. The future of Salisbury's downtown older neighborhoods is not secure—they are in danger. There exists a delicate balance between failure and success. Plans are small, but they can make a big difference in a neighborhood. The older neighborhoods deserve the City's action to protect and preserve them. Think about how much tax an older neighborhood has paid over many generations. We *do* need to sweat the small stuff in older neighborhoods. He believes that 4-way stops signs, a median in the middle of the street, more street trees, decorative fencing, adding street parking for traffic calming, protecting the edges of older neighborhoods from commercial development, a new sidewalk to the park, and even an ordinance against demolition by neglect should all be recommended to the Salisbury City Council.

Board Discussion

The chairman opened the floor for Board discussion. Dr. Beymer, who has a PhD in urban studies, was extremely positive about the comprehensive plan, stating that it is logical and ambitious, but not too. He commended staff for their work, Janet Gapen in particular, and stated that he is certainly in favor of the proposed plan.

Karen Alexander asked Janet Gapen if parking on the street could be addressed now; it would not be a very expensive proposition. It would be a very important component in an overall visible change. It could be a traffic calming issue while waiting for a median, which would cost a lot.

Jeff Smith made a MOTION to recommend approval of the North Main Small Area Plan. Karen Alexander seconded the motion with all members voting AYE. (9-0)

OTHER BOARD BUSINESS

Preston Mitchell reported that text amendment T-01-07 to amend the sign ordinance would be coming forward to the next Planning Board meeting, July 10. Both the HPC and the CAC have sent the item to committee and will be prepared to make their recommendations.

There being no further business to come before the Planning Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Dr. Mark Beymer, Chair

Diane Young Vice Chair
Diane Young, Vice Chair

Diana Moghrabi
Secretary, Diana Moghrabi